



Gardeners and nurseries, watch for lily leaf beetles

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Editors note: Photos of adult lily leaf beetles and larvae are available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/widatcp/14973517655/in/photostream/> and <https://www.flickr.com/photos/widatcp/14973182032/>.

MADISON – A bright red beetle whose young eat lilies, look like slugs, and wrap themselves in their own excrement has shown up in Marathon County.

It's the first time this pest has been found in Wisconsin or in any state farther west than Ohio. It poses an economic threat to horticulturists and an environmental threat to native lilies.

State agriculture officials are asking Wisconsin nursery owners and gardeners, especially those in Marathon County and neighboring Marshfield, to be on the lookout for the distinctive red lily leaf beetle. To date, it has been confirmed at a nursery and about a dozen home gardens in Marathon County, particularly in Kronenwetter, Mosinee and Rothschild. There is also an unconfirmed report from Marshfield.

"We're asking residents to check lilies and fritillaries for the adult beetles or for their larvae, and to take steps to control them and prevent them from spreading to other areas of the state," said Brian Kuhn, director of the Bureau of Plant Industry in the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. "You can pick them from infested plants by hand, or use one of the insecticides labeled for use on ornamental plants and available in garden centers and hardware stores."

Kuhn also asked that residents or nursery owners anywhere in the state who suspect they have found lily leaf beetles to report to datcpnursery@wisconsin.gov. The department is working with the nursery industry to prevent spread of the insect.

The adult lily leaf beetle is scarlet with a black head, antennae, legs and underside, and is ¼ to ½ inch long. It overwinters in the soil and emerges in very early spring through June. The females lay strings of eggs on the undersides of lily or fritillary leaves, up to 450 in one season. The eggs hatch into slug-like larvae that wrap themselves in their own black excrement to repel predators. After feeding for 16-24 days, they burrow into the soil and become fluorescent orange pupae that emerge in 16-22 days as red adults.

Adult females lay eggs primarily on two members of the lily family: true lilies (genus *Lilium*) and fritillaries (genus *Fritillaria*). True lilies include Asiatic, Oriental, Easter, Turk's cap and tiger lilies, as well as native lilies such as the wood lily. True lilies do not include canna lilies, calla lilies, or day lilies, either hybrids or the common orange day lilies found in so many gardens.

The larval stage causes most of the damage, although both adults and larvae will feed on leaves, stems, flower buds and flowers from lilies and other plants such as Solomon's seal and flowering tobacco.

The lily leaf beetle was first found in the United States in 1992. It has spread through New England into New York State, with one infestation in Ohio. The insect is native to Europe and Asia, and is believed to have arrived in the U.S. in a shipment of lily bulbs from Europe. It has no effective natural enemies in North America.

"We don't know when this beetle arrived in Wisconsin, how it arrived, or whether it is permanently established. We would like to know how widespread it is in Wisconsin," Kuhn said. ###

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